

# MUNEBBIH'S NORTHWESTERN BORDERS THROUGH THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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Any nuanced and balanced academic understanding of tribalism in southwest Arabia during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries up to the present requires examination of different perspectives. While seeking to agree on a main set of useful working definitions for tribes and tribalism in these Yemeni contexts – not an easy task in its own right<sup>1</sup> – scholars therefore have to recognize the validity and richness of these different perspectives, at least in so far as they relate to fluid and multi-faceted ethnographic realities.

## Introduction

Anthropological research since the 1980s has focused on various aspects for elucidating the tribal phenomena under scrutiny in Yemen. Scholars have analyzed a wide variety of crucial dimensions, such as the agency of tribal leadership (Dresch 1989), or specific courses of events and processes within their contexts in the past (Heiss 2018) and the present (Brandt 2017). Other authors have focused very appropriately on tribal and non-tribal material conditions and related expertise (Varisco 1983, 2009; Gingrich and Heiss 1986a), on tribal idioms and genealogies (Heiss 1998; Varisco 2017), on the fluidity of contested social interactions (Weir 2007), or on artful performance in dance (Adra 1998, 2016) or poetry (Caton 1993) for exploring tribal norms and values. This subtle and sophisticated pluralism of perspectives and its ensuing rich harvest of ethnographic and historical insights indeed belong to the best that anthropology and its neighboring fields have had to offer for assessing tribes and tribalism in the region. The present text is firmly rooted in this particular pluralist and ethnographically informed research legacy of more than two generations of socio-cultural anthropologists. While this chapter in a way is a tribute to that legacy, it also takes its main inspiration from it for proposing some advances and innovations.

In a nutshell, the following text<sup>2</sup> seeks to enrich the pluralism of perspectives by adding the dimension of tribal experiences from the periphery, in two senses of that word. I will discuss Munebbih<sup>3</sup> tribal

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<sup>1</sup> For Yemeni contexts I usually prefer the indigenous definition: i.e. those major social units locally referred to as *qabīlah*; see also my IESBS entry (Gingrich 2015).

<sup>2</sup> I thank Marieke Brandt (ISA at the OeAW), as this volume's editor and host of the conference preceding it, for her valuable feedback. The helpful comments by all conference participants are appreciated, in particular by Steven C. Caton (Harvard). I also gratefully acknowledge the helpful suggestions and assistance provided by Mehmet Emir, Johann Heiss (both: ISA at the OeAW) and Dave Westacott concerning an earlier version of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> The present text uses a simplified version of IJMES transliteration rules except for the accompanying map (relying on an earlier publication in German, and therefore using the German DMG transliteration system). Additional exceptions include Anglicized terms (e.g. Zaydīs, Hūthīs) and a few instances of my own versions for the vernacular forms of local names (e.g. am Jalsa, Munebbih).

perspectives, that is, views from a Khawlān al-Shām tribe<sup>4</sup> in Yemen's most remote northwest corner. Within the Munebbih, my focus will, in turn, be on their even more peripheral section of 'Ayyāsh in the hilly western and northwestern parts of Munebbih territories bordering the B. Mālik to the west (today on Saudi territory). This (inter)tribal border, later on also a state border, will thereby be at the center of my discussion throughout this chapter's three main parts: following this introduction, the second part will outline some insights on the 'Ayyāsh borderlands from my Munebbih fieldwork in the 1980s. In the third part, I will then try to assess the impact of state influences on the local intertribal border situation in this particular section during three consecutive transformation processes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The three processes of border changes addressed in this third part are:

1. the end of Ottoman rule and the subsequent Idrīsī presence after the end of WWI;
2. the results of the Saudi-Yemeni war of the 1930s with its subsequent ceasefire and border commissions; and
3. the consequences of the 1962–1970 Yemeni civil war with its implications for the northwestern Munebbih border along their 'Ayyāsh section's territory.

Finally, this chapter's fourth part will briefly offer some conclusions from the previous analysis with a focus on the periphery in tribal territoriality, on intertribal border zones and with regard to specific aspects of tribal honor in these contexts. A summary will then, fifth, comment on the local situation during the current conflict at the time of writing (i.e., in early 2019), by addressing certain long-term features of intertribal and state relations in this particular region in contexts of recent and contemporary history.

#### Fieldwork Insights on the 'Ayyāsh Section of Munebbih

Readers may or may not recall from previous publications (e.g., Gingrich 1993) that the Munebbih basically inhabit one of the high, isolated mountains more than 2000 m above sea level situated in the eastern Tihāmah – i.e., the coastal lowlands along the eastern Red Sea shores – immediately in front of the highlands' actual plateaus and mountain ranges. The upper tributaries of the Wādī (flood valley, here: W.) Jīzān (or: Jayzān, also: Jāzān) and of the W. Ḍamad are adjacent to the lower slopes of the Munebbih mountain (Jabal, or J. Munebbih) on its north and south sides respectively. Still referred to as al-'Urr in al-Hamdānī's times (10<sup>th</sup> century CE), J. Munebbih is situated between J. Fayfā' to the west and J. Rāziḥ to its south, but it is far less accessible from the outside than J. Rāziḥ.

As in most cases of these isolated mountains in the eastern Tihāmah, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the majority of the Munebbih resident population inhabited the most fertile upper ridges and slopes. Wherever possible, terraced fields cover the mountain surface from its highest elevations (except for the highest mountain peak al-'Urr, see Gingrich 2002 and 2012) to its lowest slopes, with ensuing environmentally based variations. In general, the residents of the upper and western slopes

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<sup>4</sup> This vernacular reference to the "northern" Khawlān was by far the most commonly used verbal designation during the 1980s. By its implicit distinction against Khawlān al-Ṭiyāl (to the east of Ṣan'ā') the term Khawlān al-Shām basically implies a regional focus. Since the 1980s, however, together with changes in literacy and the media landscape, the designation Khawlān b. 'Āmir has come to be more commonly used. This shift reflects explicit allusions to genealogical time (as opposed to tribal space) and to literary sources.

mostly enjoy healthier and somewhat safer lives as well as better agricultural yields than those living on the eastern and lower slopes. The inhabitants of low-lying slopes usually have better but more exposed access to communication lines toward the outside world, while animal husbandry also plays a greater role for them.

The tribal section of 'Ayyāsh primarily live in the lower, hilly western and northwestern parts of Munebbih territory between 500 and 900 m. above sea level. A few scattered parts of their section's high territories, however, extend up to areas just below J. Munebbih's second highest peak, i.e. its northern summit, J. am Khudhullah. Otherwise, however, their main tribal territories lie right on the lower mountain slopes and at their foot above the upper banks of W. Ḍamad and its tributaries (for a rough overview, see the map accompanying this chapter). Growing *qāt* or coffee is not possible here. The cultivation of cereals (primarily sorghum and emmer) and of garden products, however, is yielding rich results. Primarily this is based on the good usage of *sayl* (seasonal flood) runoff and of regulated floods, but it also relies on well-maintained cisterns and a number of springs. The 'Uyyūn 'Ayyāsh (i.e., 'Ayyāsh springs) in fact are quite famous in the region, representing this section's special pride, with the thermal springs of am Waghra in W. Qaffa right at the border being the best known among them. The 'Uyyūn 'Ayyāsh provide additional income for many residents, because, in peaceful times, they also represent a point of attraction for visitors even from the wider regional neighborhood, as was already pointed out to Philby (1952, 542–44, 546) in the 1930s.

Some of these springs provide hot mineral-water basins within small sub-tropical gardens (Gingrich 1989: 41, 69). They have been a travel destination of hope and fascination for many people from all over the region seeking treatment and healing, especially for women hoping to fall pregnant. With Mislān as the main 'Ayyāsh settlement, more than two dozen small, fortified villages and hamlets on hilltops overlook fairly large and shallow terrace areas, which then intersect at the outer margins with vast zones of grazing grounds. All 'Ayyāsh households are sedentary hoe-and-ard horti- cum agriculturalists, but they also raise goats, sheep, camels and mules. By contrast, the closest neighbors of 'Ayyāsh to the west, the B. Mālik – and, in particular, two of their subsections – are mostly semi-nomadic inasmuch as they cannot regularly rely on shifting hoe cultivation, but primarily raise small livestock.

In terms of tribal affiliation, the 'Ayyāsh are composed of two subsections (am Mushammar and am Hīlf). One of these has more land on the lower slopes, and consequently a longer part of the intertribal border. Nevertheless, the other section also controls a smaller, albeit significant, part of the Munebbih northwest border with the outside world, while most of their lands lie at somewhat higher elevations.

All the 'Ayyāsh are part of the Munebbih's Sha'sha' moiety, and together with all of the Munebbih, they belong to the Furūd tribes of Khawlān al-Shām. By contrast, their western neighbors from B. Mālik belong to the Yahāniyyah tribes of Khawlān al-Shām (Gingrich and Heiss 1986b, 46, 56; Gingrich 1989, 159–164). Immediately above most of the 'Ayyāsh territories, the slopes are too steep and barren for any other Munebbih settlements. In that sense, the 'Ayyāsh have represented the somewhat isolated but fairly powerful Munebbih outpost section to the low-lying northwest. The 'Ayyāsh do not have one overall section chief, but the two subsections' chiefs are reported to have mostly collaborated with each other quite well.

At the time of my fieldwork, the 'Ayyāsh were clearly much more affluent economically and stronger in demographic and military terms than their semi-nomadic B. Mālik neighbors below them. In fact, during my fieldwork phrases like “those below us who are living up here in 'Ayyāsh country” were not only an occasional expression of social distinction about other residents in the adjoining lower Tihāmah lands. This was also a visual reference, whenever my hosts sat down with me in the evenings on the

roofs of their towers and houses. While drinking tea and discussing the rising and setting of stars as my main research interest at the time, we also contemplated and interpreted the landscapes below us. “This is all Khawlān country” was the consensual phrase, and fingers described the huge ranges from J. Fayfā’ a distance away in front of us, across B. Mālik country below us, to J. Munebbih behind us where – in our upward perspectives – wall above wall of terraced fields looked like an insurmountable stone fortress for anybody approaching from the west. “Down there far below us” in the dry intertribal border zones with small fields and large pastures, a single tree provided ample shade in the evening light. Shajjar am Jalsa<sup>5</sup> indicated a specialized neutral zone for meetings and negotiations, set aside right along the ‘Ayyāsh and Munebbih intertribal border with their northwestern neighbors.

In addition to this neutral meeting ground, the intertribal borders along major parts of this section<sup>6</sup> were to an extent openly permeable. Interactions across the intertribal border were regulated by customary law contracts, and mostly related to grazing rights. In the long run, these local border contracts between the ‘Ayyāsh and some of the neighboring subsections from B. Mālik either had to be renegotiated, or they could be confirmed and continued whenever necessary. Sometimes renegotiations were preceded by violent clashes, but mostly they followed mere threats or tensions under peaceful circumstances. On a few occasions these renewals of local border contracts were even enhanced and strengthened through intertribal marriage. These border renewal contracts were signed by the shaykhs of the different subsections involved and by additional local guarantors from elsewhere in the immediate neighborhood. Only a few of these intertribal border renewal contracts were also signed by the two *shaykh al-shamal* (i.e., paramount tribal chiefs) of the Munebbih and the B. Mālik, but hardly ever by the distant representatives of the Zaydī and Sunni religious elites (e.g. on J. Rāziḥ or in the coastal Tihāmah (Dostal 2011).

Not a single unit of police, customs or army was mentioned or became visible between J. Fayfā’ and the lower slopes of J. Munebbih during the mid- and late 1980s. This was something of a contrast to the low border zones of J. Rāziḥ to the south, where Johann Heiss and I had visited a somewhat dilapidated and neglected Yemeni state border control post in a low-lying western Rāziḥ section in 1983.

### Historical Vignettes of ‘Ayyāsh Border Constellations

This third part briefly examines three historical vignettes from the 20<sup>th</sup> century related to changing intertribal border sections and alternating states’ influence in the ‘Ayyāsh area.

#### *Vignette 1: Late Ottoman and Idrīsī Period, 1900–1924*

Following the Ottomans’ 1848 establishment of their (second) period of colonial administration in the region, they sought to provide a regional infrastructure that suited their commercial and military interests. Between the Tihāmah’s Red Sea shorelines and the high mountain ridges and plateaus of southwest Arabia, Ottoman initiatives opened and maintained a number of fortified supply routes in a

<sup>5</sup> See Behnstedt 1987, and examples for as well as modifications to Behnstedt’s rough outline in Gingrich 1989: 168–172, 576–578 (notes 126–138), for specificities in the Munebbih vernacular. These also include the (wider regional) prevalence of *im* or *am* as the definite article.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed in historical vignette 2 of this chapter’s next section, other parts of this border continued to be regulated more strictly at the time of my fieldwork sojourn. This was the enduring outcome of a contract element from the later part of the 1930s, following the ceasefire agreement and its implementation procedures after the Saudi-Yemeni war of those years.

general west-east direction. This type of quasi-colonial development accelerated especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Blumi 2010). One of these new fortified routes went via Mīdī to Rāziḥ, another led from Jīzān via Abū 'Arīsh to Abhā. From the 1870s and 1880s, the Ottoman administrative and military presence was therefore active in the wider vicinity to the west, south (coast and routes via Rāziḥ) and east (Ṣa'dah and outposts) of Munebbih territory, thus having an impact upon supply lines and goods of relevance for them. Nevertheless, apart from this circulation of new goods I am aware of no extant record of any immediate administrative or military Ottoman presence in the rough intertribal terrain between J. Fayfā' and 'Ayyāsh or Munebbih in general. Taxation paid to the Ottomans may have occurred very occasionally through tribal leaders, while Zaydī religious or legal influence was also minimal. Old hosts of mine said in the 1980s that their grandparents had referred to the late Ottoman years as very peaceful. The Ottomans seem to have left the 'Ayyāsh essentially to themselves to pursue their tribal interests, I was told, and health tourism to the 'Uyyūn 'Ayyāsh flourished, even by families coming from as far away as Jīzān and al-Ḥudaydah. In addition, some of my hosts referred to local families' histories that also included extra income sources from transporting coffee (acquired from the upper Munebbih slopes and through related local markets) and selling it to coastal merchants. From these local accounts it is possible to tease out a growing 'Ayyāsh entanglement in regional and trans-tribal commercial activities, within a much wider but partially loose Ottoman administrative network over the entire region.

After Ottoman rule in 'Asīr, Jīzān and Yemen collapsed in 1918, the Idrīsī (i.e. Muḥammad ibn 'Alī and, as of 1923, al-Ḥasan) sought to establish themselves not merely spiritually, but also as a (small) buffer principality in this region. To an extent this was realized primarily in the coastal areas between the Zaydīs – now newly in control in the southeast – and the re-emerging Āl Sa'ūd power (Wahhabis) in the north and northwest. The Idrīsī managed to sustain their regional mini-state with some limited success until the late 1920s, but they came under increasing pressure from the Saudis until gradually giving in by 1930 (Baldry 2015; Bang 1996). In the sense that the Idrīsī realm in the Khawlān al-Shām western areas extended from the coast around Jīzān in the west to the peaks of Munebbih in the east from 1919 until the late 1920s, the Idrīsī mini-state did in fact operate for a brief decade as a regional state successor to the Ottomans. For some time the Munebbih leadership accepted that 'Ayyāsh supplied and supported Idrīsī forces, perhaps also in view of continued tourism from the coast to its hot springs. The Munebbih *shaykh al-shamal* Ibn 'Awfān even hosted a tiny Idrīsī armed force on top of its main mountain peak al-'Urr with an eye to keeping the Zaydīs to the east (Jumā'ah) and south (Rāziḥ) at bay. That small Idrīsī outpost built a stone cistern on the al-'Urr plateau, which was shown to me as testimony to the friendly features in Idrīsī-Munebbih relations. Yet in sum, the fragile, brief and volatile Idrīsī presence among the 'Ayyāsh and Munebbih did very little to actually change the intertribal border zone – which is precisely one of the reasons why both the Ottoman and Idrīsī presence were still remembered with some sympathy in the days of my fieldwork. By and large, it seems that the 'Ayyāsh experienced Ottoman and Idrīsī activities in their region as encounters with “states as distant umbrellas,” gradually approaching local arenas but primarily protective of them from afar, leaving most local affairs to the locals but controlling some of the wider infrastructure (see also Blumi 2009). It is also noteworthy that both the more distant Ottoman as well as the less distant Idrīsī presence represented variants of Sunni theological orientations that primarily advanced from the west and locally encountered some sympathy. That local sympathy for “Sunnis to the west” corresponded to the fact that those “states as distant umbrellas” had left the Munebbih intertribal borders along their 'Ayyāsh section undisturbed and intact on the ground.

*Vignette 2: From the 1934 War to Philby's Border Commission*

The main components of the 1934 Saudi-Yemeni armed conflict have been analyzed repeatedly as to its crucial motivations, sequences, outcome and consequences (e.g., Baldry 1985; Dresch 2000). While pro-Wahhabi military and tribal forces moved southward in the Tihāmah (i.e. beyond Mīdī toward al-Ḥudaydah) as much as in the highlands (down to Abhā, Zahrān, and Najrān), the tribal leadership of the Munebbih declared that they would defend their territories “against the invaders from Riyād,” as they phrased it.<sup>7</sup> They also indicated their readiness to accept Zaydī support. By contrast, the Ahl Fayfā’ signaled their readiness to cooperate with Ibn Sa‘ūd’s forces as long as their local habits were respected – which is why they were subsequently allowed to continue growing *qāt* until at least into the 1990s. Meanwhile, the B. Mālik by reputation seem to have declared their own stand as “neutral.” Consequently, the Fayfā’ and B. Mālik territories, at first merely in a formal and superficial sense, thereby became part of the young Saudi kingdom’s new southwestern territories. By contrast, the Munebbih – at first also merely in a similarly superficial sense – remained in the other new post-Ottoman realm of the recently independent northern Yemeni kingdom, whose centers had been controlled by the Zaydī Imams since 1918.

Several years later, as a by-product and result of the Yemeni-Saudi armistice negotiations and ceasefire agreement of 1934, a Saudi border commission led by King Sa‘ūd’s adviser H. St. J. B. Philby sought to establish and demarcate the provisional state border on the ground. Actually, this state contract-based ceasefire line in the region was marked by means of numbered stone pillars (Philby 1952: 507, 515, 541), most of which had disappeared during the time of my fieldwork in the 1980s. In the absence of any other state representatives or corresponding documents related to local contexts, that Saudi border commission mostly relied on existing intertribal *‘urf* contracts, or on intertribal negotiations imposed by the commission itself, along the entire western Munebbih tribal border including ‘Ayyāsh. In doing so they also changed rights over two major grazing grounds. Until then these two pastures had been basic ‘Ayyāsh property with renewable usage rights for the B. Mālik. Now, the border commission promoted their transformation into permanent B. Mālik property under *‘urf* and bilateral state law. The chiefs of all subsections involved signed the relevant documents, as did the two *shaykhs al-shamal* concerned, together with nominated state representatives from the region. If I am not mistaken, then this must have been one of, if not the first occasion when ‘Ayyāsh representatives were informally assigned the task of henceforth guarding the ceasefire line along their section not only for themselves and the Munebbih, but also for the distant Zaydī imamate state’s centers. The ‘Ayyāsh had been entrusted with a new task – that is, acting as informal and semi-official guardians of a contested state frontier.

In turn, the accomplished redefinition of the relevant border section resulted in a small but clear expansion of B. Mālik territory on behalf of the Saudis, to the disadvantage of ‘Ayyāsh for Munebbih and Yemen. Other intertribal grazing rights across the ceasefire line in this region (involving other Munebbih sections) were left as they were by the commission. The previously strong Munebbih outpost position by ‘Ayyāsh, however, was limited and confined in these two parts (and another, smaller one) of the intertribal border. Seen from the ‘Ayyāsh perspective, this certainly represented a case when the young Saudi state served as a substantial force in support of their B. Mālik opponents, while no other tribal or state force

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<sup>7</sup> These accounts rely on Italian summaries of contemporary developments in the (pro-Mussolini) Italian journal *Oriente Moderno*, 1931–35. Those printed overviews were primarily authored by the well-known Arabist and Yemen expert Ettore Rossi, who obviously relied on local agents on the Zaydī side and their reports to him.

had effectively stepped in to support the 'Ayyāsh. In theory at least, this 1936/7 border redefinition also transformed parts of a fluid territorial boundary into a state line, which henceforth could be used to cut off the 'Ayyāsh from their long-established connections to the western lowlands. In practice, however, the changes were less dramatic. B. Mālik could merely continue their use of those pastures but now without consulting with the 'Ayyāsh— and the 'Ayyāsh continued all their other tribal transactions across the ceasefire line throughout the following thirty years, until the imamate began to collapse.

*Vignette 3: 'Ayyāsh during the 1962–70 Civil War*

Early on in northern Yemen's civil war of the 1960s, *shaykh al-shamal* Ibn 'Awfān declared that Munebbih would remain neutral in the ongoing conflict (Gingrich 1993). To a significant extent, this had to do with the fact that until then the Munebbih had actually never accepted any *sādah* presence or settlement on their territory, and in fact continued not to do so thereafter. Although Munebbih suffered from some Egyptian air raids because of their neutrality, remaining neutral during the early phases of the civil war simply continued that basic stand of keeping the Zaydī *sādah* at bay. By the mid-sixties, Ibn 'Awfān then openly sided with the distant republican government in Ṣan'ā'. The secular and weak republic represented a more interesting ally, in particular since the neighboring Khawlān al-Shām tribes to the south and east (i.e. Rāziḥ and Jumā'ah) continued to be closely allied with the royalist cause.

During that period, before and immediately after the 1967 Egyptian withdrawal from the civil war, 'Ayyāsh effectively helped to cut or block all efforts at supplying arms from the Saudi Red Sea coast to the royalists' remaining strongholds on the plateau. Not for the first time in their history, armed raids and guerrilla expeditions thereby became part of the Munebbih image as fearless and dangerous warriors in the wider region. Because of their exposed position and their familiarity with the hilly western Tihāma terrain, 'Ayyāsh played a significant role in those armed anti-royalist guerrilla campaigns along and beyond the ceasefire line.

For many years – in fact, for two decades until the time of my own fieldwork – the Munebbih therefore came to be known as the republic's most reliable if not exclusive tribal ally in the northwest. With the end of the civil war, the republic's position gradually stabilized. During the early 1970s, the Ṣan'ā' government officially upgraded several tribal chiefs in the northern provinces, Ibn 'Awfān for Munebbih among them, as official border guardians on behalf of the republic. Eventually, this went together with regular payments from Ṣan'ā' for Banū 'Awfān, who redistributed substantial parts of those sums to the chiefs of subsections along the ceasefire line, such as those of 'the Ayyāsh. Local tribesmen were thereby in some sense promoted by and on behalf of the state – if not partially integrated as auxiliary tribal state forces in the absence of the distant state's regular forces.

Henceforth, armed 'Ayyāsh tribal members would not merely act as guardians of their own western border as the entire tribe's border zone, but also as semi-official guardians of the Yemeni republic's northwesternmost border. Although on the ground this was as invisible as Eric Wolf's (and John Cole's) proverbial "hidden frontier" (Wolf and Cole 1974), the contracts from 1937 and from 1972 were still in effect during my fieldwork sojourn, and cash continued to flow from Ṣan'ā' through the Munebbih *shaykh al-shamal* to the 'Ayyāsh shaykhs.

Once again during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'Ayyāsh and Munebbih had thereby redefined their position regarding their border with the B. Mālik. From a fortified, neutral tribal enclave under siege between the royalists and the republicans in the early days of the civil war, they were now promoted to quasi-official state guardians of that border, or, as they preferred to see it: they continued to take care of their own border with some additional help from a distant state as their ally.

## Conclusions

We have seen through the ‘Ayyāsh example that the tribal border usually features no specialized, man-made markers on the ground, but rather renewable contracts on shared usage rights combined with occasional symbolic natural landmarks for orientation and neutral zones, such as the “Shajjar am Jalsa.” We also saw that in terms of agreements, all contracts are signed by the representatives of local sections and subsections, sometimes together with the *shaykh al-shamal* or his plenipotentiary. This sheds some additional light on the contractual status of tribal representatives. The signatures on contracts redefining intertribal border sections imply that legally and symbolically, the representatives of (sub-) sections in border regions not only have to stand for their personal as well as their (sub-) section’s honor, but more frequently than others also for their overall tribe’s collective honor. After all, a tribe’s territorial integrity is also part of a tribe’s name, standing, and reputation.

In principle, it is valid for any Munebbih tribal man (and in a somewhat different way also for a tribal woman) that they not merely represent and defend their personal honor and reputation but also that of their family, (sub-) section, and sometimes, of the entire tribe if facing challenges from members of other tribes. Yet in practical terms, the challenge to defend one’s overall tribal honor occurs only rarely for average Munebbih tribal members, since the majority of them live in the densely populated highest mountain ridges. Consequently, they would only occasionally face external challenges to their overall tribal affiliation and its name, such as on market days, during military campaigns, or while peacefully travelling elsewhere. By contrast, the *shaykh al-shamal* and his personal representatives (from Banū ‘Awfān, such as one of his brothers or sons) and the tribal member from an intertribal border section such as ‘Ayyāsh regularly have to engage with external challenges to overall tribal honor. They answer to this task, however, from different relational positions and hence by different means.

A high-ranking Banū ‘Awfān member represents a chiefly lineage whose members have been “protected” by all major sections of the Munebbih for at least four centuries. The tribal protection for the paramount chiefly lineage implies that they *need* protection – in a strict sense, they are supposed primarily to stand up not for their narrow personal interests but *for overall tribal interests* to the outside (i.e., vis-à-vis other tribal leaders or governments) as well as internally (by mediating and solving internal tribal conflicts at the highest level). The need for continuous tribal protection for the Banū ‘Awfān, for their permanent overall tribal representation, becomes symbolically and materially evident in the escorts. These armed guards are composed of Banū ‘Awfān and armed tribesmen, who always accompany the *shaykh al-shamal* on his missions (Gingrich 2011). Ibn ‘Awfān therefore never himself fights with arms, but only by means of law and diplomacy. He represents overall tribal honor that is transferred to him by the sections’ commitment to protecting the paramount chiefly lineage. In this sense, the *shaykh al-shamal*’s main task in representing overall tribal honor is the maintenance or establishment of peaceful solutions.

This is not the primary assignment of those tribal members such as the ‘Ayyāsh, who live along an intertribal border zone. Differing in this regard from the Banū ‘Awfān and the majority of average tribal members in the central and upper Munebbih territories, the ‘Ayyāsh are rarely confronted with any intra-tribal tensions or conflicts. Yet similar to the Banū ‘Awfān, they more or less regularly face external challenges to which they have to answer for themselves and, simultaneously, for the overall tribe and its territorial and symbolic integrity. What for an average tribal member may occur only occasionally while otherwise being just a theoretical principle is therefore a regular element of tribal honor on the territorial periphery. Along the intertribal border, tribal members regularly have to answer external challenges in peaceful or violent ways, addressing them and defending their (sub-) section’s as



well as the overall tribal integrity, name and reputation. This implies a potential for the emergence of tribal war leaders, who may temporarily become military leaders for larger tribal groups of armed units.

A number of additional features underpin and inform these specificities of intertribal borders and their interface with conflict, peace, and contracts. In a spatial and temporal sense, tribal borders include broader zones of mutuality and of neutrality, as well as shorter time rhythms for renegotiations or renewals. This is implied in the short annual or biannual cycles for renegotiating co-usage of grazing grounds, and for more enduring border changes after armed conflicts. The notion of a more volatile, broad, frayed and permeable border “zone” thus might be more appropriate for intertribal borders,<sup>8</sup> in contrast to ideas about any enduring intertribal border “lines” in space.

For the different forms of state interventions in this particular area during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the present text has addressed various manifestations of state agency: A first historical vignette discussed gradually approaching “state umbrellas” before the mid-1920s. First elements of new states appearing as an “auxiliary force” on one side at the expense of the other in intertribal affairs of the mid- and late 1930s were identified in the second vignette. This highlighted ensuing transformations of provisional and flexible *urf* contracts into supposedly permanent treaties, including linear instead of zonal claims (between numbered stone pillars) on the ground. The third vignette from the Cold War period demonstrated, first, how the local presence of states as auxiliary forces expanded, but also how local tribal sections were transformed more intensely than previously into auxiliary forces for states in the region. This also included the contractual and financial integration of tribesmen as guardians not only of their intertribal border but also, based on that, as official republican border guardians – while in fact they sought to continue treating the border as a zone rather than a line.

A certain gradually increasing presence in the region by various states therefore cannot be denied, if these three vignettes are compared over the flow of regional history between the 1880s and the 1980s. Yet this progressively linear aspect of a general increase in state presence is not the only tendency that becomes apparent – and perhaps not even the most important one. In addition to the linear tendencies of increasing state presence, one may also detect fractures and breaks interrupting any linear advancement of state influence from whatever side. Some of these ruptures were unique, but several of them displayed strong elements of redundant rhythms over time that recall the French bon mot “*plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*” They suggest alternating but recurrent cycles of peripheral tribal agency with state interventions in the region.

Sometimes, state claims on intertribal border zones may turn out to be highly compatible with tribal aspirations, as was the case during the Idrīsī interlude as well as during my fieldwork in the 1980s. These were two periods when the state powers in question sought stability for themselves during periods of weakness in their distant centers. At times, however, tribal and state interests in the region have, in fact, been almost irreconcilable, such as during the civil war of the 1960s or during the Ḥūthī wars and the ensuing Saudi involvement since 2015. In these almost irreconcilable constellations, shifting alliances between local tribal leaderships (that themselves changed in the course of events) and *specific* state interests as pursued on the ground and (since the 1960s) by air, as well as by changing media outlets, became the notorious general pattern of interaction.

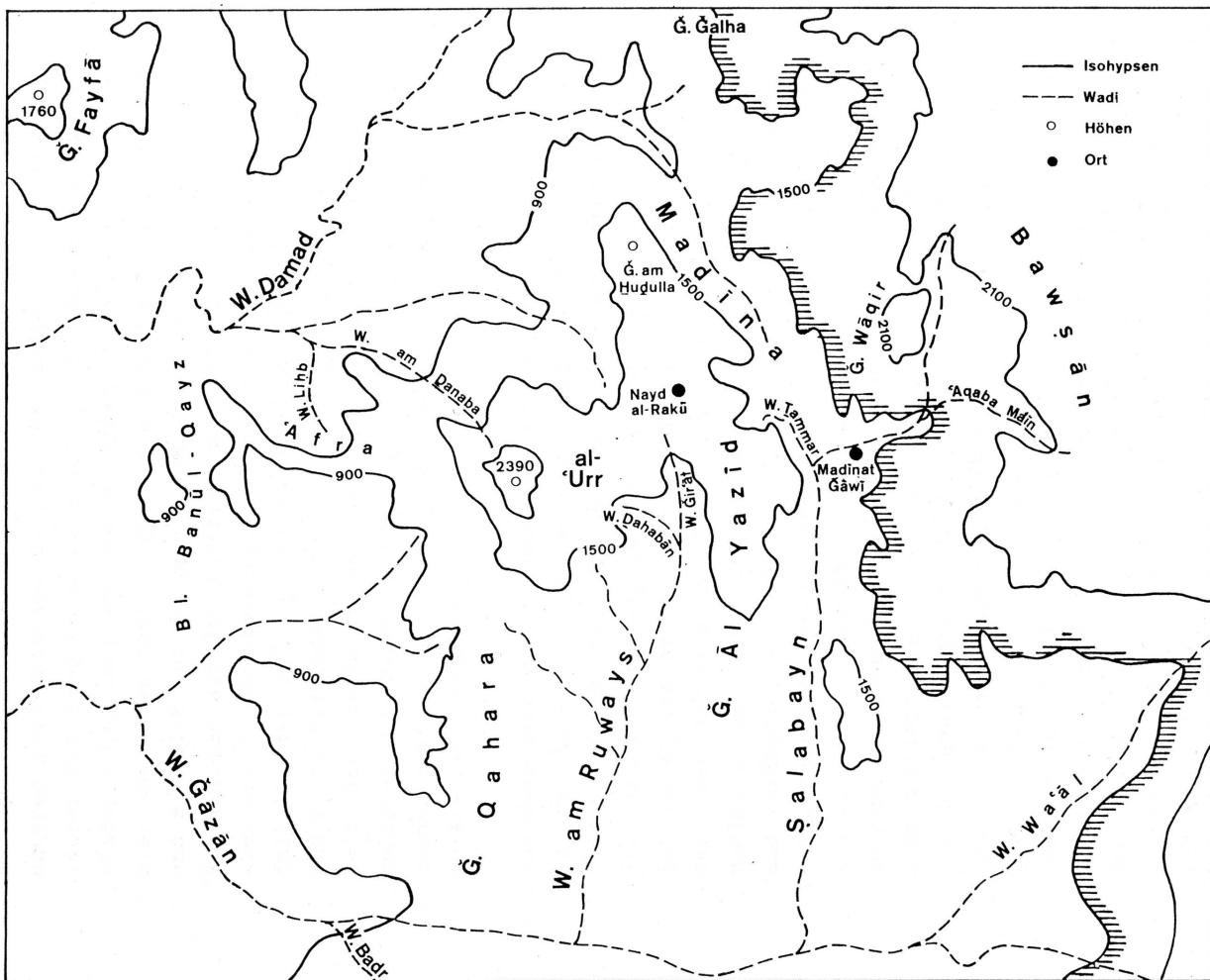
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<sup>8</sup> Philby's (1952, 548) description of the phenomenon in the same region used the wording that “the tribal areas on either side were running in complicated strips”.

Within today's contexts of the wider confrontations between the Ḥūthīs and the Saudis and their respective supporters in the north and beyond, for all I know the Munebbih territory has basically been cut up. These are now two artificially separated tribal subterritories under opposing military and religious influence, with a small neutral zone under Banū 'Awfān administration in the middle. In fact, the Banū 'Awfān have turned out to be the one chiefly lineage in the entire (Yemeni side of the) Khawlān al-Shām region who have managed to remain in office, while most other established chiefs' families have been driven out in the course of the Ḥūthī wars (Brandt 2014). The Banū 'Awfān's resilience, and the tribal majorities' willingness to identify with them and support them, thereby defines a potential for a future symbolic and material Munebbih integrity amid factors opposing such potentials. After all, tribal administrative and political partition is continuing at the time of writing.

The easternmost, low-lying slopes of Munebbih (facing Jumā'ah) are controlled by Ḥūthī supporters, whereas the west with 'Ayyāsh is part of a formally "demilitarized" zone imposed by Saudi military forces. Effectively they seem to be controlled by groups promoting a stronger and more enduring Saudi presence. As encountered by most resident groups in the region, previously unknown threats of observation and military drone strikes have to be coped with by the Munebbih sections on both sides. Simultaneously, and for the first time in their history, 'Ayyāsh have been transformed into lukewarm Saudi auxiliary forces. It seems that women attending 'Uyyūn 'Ayyāsh has been prohibited, and it remains doubtful whether the nearby Saudi military presence will invite any new visitors from the coast.

These are definitely times when tribalism and state influences in such intertribal-cum-state border areas do not co-exist well with each other at all. In one way, the current "territorial division of Munebbih" maybe has to be seen as a radical implementation of what had informed the intentions of state interventions all along in these border lands, ever since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: basically, they always followed a hegemonic "divide and rule" general state logic. In another way, however, the current "territorial division of Munebbih" may very well be seen as just as provisional and temporary as all the other previous state interventions have been since the 1870s – waxing and waning, coming and going.



Map: Jabal Munebbih

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